Population Trends and Health Indicators in New York State Prisons and Jails: Fact Sheet

December 2024

People who come into contact with New York's criminal legal system—and especially those subject to incarceration—are [disproportionately Black and Hispanic](#) and often hail from [marginalized communities](#) struggling with poverty, homelessness, unemployment, and inadequate social services. National studies have found that incarcerated people experience especially high rates of [drug dependence](#) and other [mental health challenges](#). Beyond its traditional due process and adjudication responsibility, the criminal legal system, therefore, routinely refers or directs people to medical or mental health treatment. Moreover, the Department of Correction is New York City's [largest provider](#) of psychiatric services. Updated with 2024 data, this document reviews key facts about the incarcerated population in New York's jails and prisons.

New York City Jails

Key Population Metrics

A [new dashboard](#) from the Data Collaborative for Justice (DCJ) offers real-time information updated daily on the size of New York City's jail population; sub-populations based on case status (pretrial, sentenced, etc.); the women's population; racial disparities; people receiving mental health services; and future population projections. As of December 9, 2024, data indicates:

- **Overall Jail Population:** From **over 20,000** people in 1991, NYC's daily jail population reached a historic low of **3,809** on April 29, 2020 amid [humane efforts to release people](#) at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, before increasing by over **75%** to nearly **6,700** today. DCJ's current one-year projection estimates the population will **increase by about 100** between now and December 2025.

- **Pretrial Detention:** People presumed innocent of any crime and held in pretrial detention make up **84%** of the current jail population, up from a low of **57%** in March of 2020. Jail sentences now account for **8%**, parole violations **5%**, and all other categories **3%** of NYC's jail population.

- **Race/Ethnicity:** People of color make up **92%** of the jail population. Black people comprise 59% of the population compared to 23% of NYC's general population. Relative to their citywide population numbers, Black people are currently almost **12 times** more likely to be put in jail than white people.

- **Gender:** NYC jails held **under 200** women in December 2020, before this number more than doubled to **nearly 430** today—increasing by about **120%** while the men's population increased **33%**.

- **Age:** People from ages 18 to 24 comprise **16%** of the current jail population, down from **24%** in 2016 (before passage of the State's [Raise the Age law](#)). On the other end of the spectrum, data indicates that **9%** of the current jail population consists of people ages 55 and up, up slightly from **7%** in 2016. [Research](#) [indicates](#) that people involved in the criminal legal system at ages 55 and up have especially high rates of serious medical conditions and mental illnesses as well as high rates of homelessness.

- **NYC Borough:** As of October 2024, data from the [Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice](#) reveals **32%** of NYC's jail population had court cases in Manhattan, **27%** in Brooklyn, **20%** in Queens, **17%** in the Bronx, and **4%** in Staten Island. Since 2016, the only notable changes are Manhattan's share declining from **38%** to **32%** and Brooklyn's increasing from **22%** to **27%**.

Mental Health

- **Mental Health Flag:** While this does not signify a formal diagnosis, the [latest data](#) indicates that **57%** of today's NYC jail population have needed mental health services while incarcerated, up from **42%** eight years ago in December 2016 and up from **49%** just three years ago in December 2021.

- **Diagnostic Indicators:** NYC's [Correctional Health Services](#) (CHS) provides monthly fact sheets with diagnoses present in the jail population. As of October 2024, CHS reported:
  - **Serious Mental Illness: 21%** of the population (compared to [17% in October 2020](#)).
  - **Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD): 28%** with alcohol use disorder; **23%** with opioid use disorder.
  - **Homelessness:** CHS estimated **26%** are homeless or "likely to be homeless" when released.

- **Relationships Among Mental Health, Gender, and Time in Custody:** Data for December 2024 indicates that **85%** of the women's jail population needed mental health services while incarcerated, compared to **55%** of men. People needing mental health services who are currently in custody have averaged **278 days** in jail, **40%** more than the **199 days** averaged for everyone else. However, causality is complicated. The fact that someone required services could reflect a preexisting mental health condition and/or trauma or other mental health challenges brought about by damaging experiences at Rikers Island.

- **Physical Health:** People held in NYC jails suffer from high rates of chronic medical conditions and exposure to violence inside the jails—documented in [over 50 federal monitor reports and letters](#).

- **Medical Conditions:** As of October 2024, [CHS data](#) indicates that **28%** of the jail population was diagnosed with **lung disease** (e.g., asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease); **14%** with **cardiovascular disease** (e.g., hypertension or heart failure); **8%** with **neurologic disease** (e.g., epilepsy, cerebrovascular disease, or stroke history); **6%** with **diabetes**; **4%** with **hepatitis B or C**; **3%** with stage 3+ **chronic kidney disease**; **3%** with **HIV/AIDS**, and **1%** with a **malignancy**.

- **Exposure to Violence:** The NYC Comptroller's [Rikers dashboard](#) indicates that when comparing September 2019 to September 2024, monthly **stabbings and slashings** per 1,000 people rose from **2.0** to **5.0**; **fights among incarcerated people** rose from **60.4** to **99.8**; and **assaults on staff** declined from **14.2** to **8.2**. Comparing 2019, Quarter 2 to 2024, Quarter 2, **use of force rates** per 1,000 increased from **231** to **282**. *(Numbers are recomputed from the Comptroller's raw data.)*

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Suburban and Upstate Jails

For jails outside New York City, public information is sparse. The Division of Criminal Justice Services reports that in 2014, the jail population outside NYC averaged about **16,200**. This figure dropped by nearly half to just over **8,200** in 2020, before rising by **27%** to **10,468** in October 2024.

Pretrial detention while people are presumed innocent of any crime accounted for 67% of the latest upstate and suburban jail population, compared to 84% in New York City.

The 57 suburban and upstate counties accounted for **61%** of the State's October jail total, including:

- **Suburbs: 2,293 (13%)**—Suffolk **977** (**6%**); Nassau: **727** (**4%**); Westchester: 589 (**4%**).

- **Upstate Counties with Urban Centers: 2,608 (15%)**—Erie (Buffalo): **777** (**5%**); Monroe (Rochester): **769** (**5%**); Onondaga (Syracuse): **578** (**3%**); Albany (Albany City): **484** (**3%**).

- **Additional Counties: 5,567 (33%)—average of 124** per county (**50** remaining upstate counties).

New York State Prisons

Key Population Metrics

Based on a Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) population profile as of December 1, 2024 and a Data Collaborative for Justice report covering earlier years:

- **Overall Prison Population:** From almost 73,000 people in 1999, the daily prison population fell by **58%** to just over **30,400** in 2022, before ticking up **10%** to **33,446** as of December 1, 2024.

- **Regional Composition:** From 2008 to 2024, people indicted in New York City declined from **51%** to **38%** of the State's prison population; the suburbs of Long Island and Westchester changed little (**11%** to **10%**); counties with urban centers of Albany, Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse increased from **15%** to **19%**; and the remaining 50 counties increased from **23%** to **33%**.

- **County Composition:** Of New York's 62 counties, indictments in these "top 10" account for **64%** of the December 2024 statewide prison population: **Manhattan (13%), Brooklyn (10%), Queens (8%), Monroe (7%), Bronx (6%), Erie (5%), Onondaga (5%), Suffolk (5%), Nassau (3%), and Albany (3%)**. In part, these findings reflect variable general population size. An analysis of 2023 data indicated that prison *incarceration rates per 1,000 people* were highest in **Schenectady, Chemung, Genesee, Sullivan, and Albany.** Notably, **Manhattan** had the *highest* incarceration rate of NYC's five boroughs (though 13 upstate counties were higher); and the suburbs of **Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester** accounted for three of the State's ten *lowest* incarceration rates.

- **Drug Charges:** From 2008 to 2024, people convicted of a drug felony dropped from **29%** to **10%** of the prison population, the steepest decline of any charge type.

- **Violent Charges:** People convicted of a violent felony rose from **54%** to **73%**. Attribution is difficult, but in general, the 2000s saw a significant expansion of alternative to incarceration (ATI) programs—reflecting [documented](#) [effects](#) of the 2009 Rockefeller Drug Law Reform as well as the [statewide expansion of mental health courts](#) and, since 2017, [expanded ATI investments in New York City](#). However, these programs largely—though [not exclusively](#)—serve people charged with nonviolent felonies and misdemeanors.

- **Security Level:** [As of November 2024](#), 44% of the prison population is held in a maximum security facility, 54% are held in a medium security facility, and 2% are held a minimum security facility.

Demographics and Educational Background

The [DOCCS population profile](#) also indicates:

- **Race/Ethnicity:** The racial/ethnic composition of the December 2024 prison population is **49%** Black, **24%** Hispanic, **23%** white, and **4%** additional groups. The incarceration rate is **8.3 times** higher for Black than white people and **2.9 times** higher for Hispanic than white people.

- **Gender:** Women make up **4%** and non-binary people **0.3%** (112 people) of the December 2024 prison population.

- **Age:** While **15%** of the population are at the vulnerable ages of 55 and over, on the other end of the spectrum **8%** are youth under the age of 25.

- **Education:** Of the December 2024 prison population, **31%** have less than a high school degree, **64%** graduated high school or attained a high school equivalency, but just 5% graduated college or received a post-secondary education certificate of any kind. *(Missing data is excluded.)*

Exposure to Violence

The Correctional Association of New York's [Unusual Incidents Dashboard](#) traces contraband discovery and exposure to violence incidents on a monthly basis since 2014:

- **Assaults:** In 2023, there were **2,108** reported **assaults on incarcerated individuals**, up 140% from **864** in 2014. In 2023, there were **1,658** reported **assaults on staff**, up **120%** from 744 in 2014.

- **Staff Use of Weapons:** In 2023, there were also **2,898** reported **staff uses of weapons**, compared to just **191** reported uses in 2014.

- **Self-Harm:** In 2023, there were **142 suicide attempts** and **60 self-inflicted injuries**, compared to **182** and **93**, respectively, in 2014.

- **Deaths:** In 2024, **114** people held in State prisons [died through October](#), compared to **108** people throughout all of 2023 and **132** people in 2014.

Mental Health

The latest available [DOCCS report](#) as of December 31, 2022 indicates:

- **Levels of Care:** The NYS Office of Mental Health (OMH) has multiple levels of care based on the severity of an assessed mental health condition. Levels 1 and 2 involve staff on hand to provide treatment full-time (daytime hours), while Levels 3 and 4 involve part-time staff. On December 31, 2022, **13%** of the prison population was in Levels 1-2 and **15%** were in Levels 3-4 (totaling **28%**).

- **Mental Health Care by Gender:** In 2022, **68%** of women were assigned to Levels 1-4, compared to **26%** of men. Concerning Levels 1-2 only, **34%** of women and **12%** of men were assigned to them.

- **Serious Mental Illness (SMI):** In December 2022, **6%** of the population (compared to **4%** on December 31, 2009) were diagnosed with a SMI. The gender breakdown in 2022 was **10%** of women compared to **6%** of men. *Not all people with a SMI are placed in a specialized unit falling within the levels of care system, however (only 56% in 2022).*

Drug Treatment

DOCCS submits regular reports on two drug treatment initiatives:

- **Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT):** [DOCCS reports](#) making MAT available in all 44 correctional facilities. On July 1, 2024, **3,731** people (11% of the prison population) were actively receiving MAT. Of those, **85%** were receiving Buprenorphine, **13%** Methadone, and **2%** Naltrexone.

- **Alcohol and Substance Abuse Treatment:** Since 1989, DOCCS has implemented an off-prison residential treatment program [known as CASAT](#) and open to people housed in medium or minimum security facilities. Enrollment, however, is relatively low: **992** active Phase 1 participants on June 30, 2003, before declining by **83%** to **171** participants on January 1, 2024. Phase 1 and Phase 2 participants combined totaled **232** people in January 2024 representing (**1%** of the prison population).

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